

JIREH PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCH, BRISBANE

CALVINISM IN AN AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

In 1978 Jireh Baptist Church ceased operation after 117 years of ministry. It was the third Baptist church formed in Queensland and was especially important because it was the first and one of the few to be established for specific doctrinal reasons rather than for any other. Its clear identity and sense of purpose was a product of its Calvinist doctrinal basis. However, its early stability and growth also owed a good deal to the fact that it was established soon after the formation of Queensland as a colony separate from New South Wales (which took place in 1859). 1860-1870 was a decade of erratic yet remarkable growth for the new colony and for its capital city in which the church was located (1).

The Jireh Church was also important for its role in Baptist witness on the north side of Brisbane, being responsible directly or indirectly for the formation of at least eight other churches in the area. Furthermore, it supplied Queensland's first Baptist missionary, Miss Martha Plested, and the first two home mission superintendents.

It is fortunate that the records of the church are well preserved, the early ones being quite detailed in some matters, making it possible to study the church's life with some clarity (2).

Formation: Background

The Jireh Church was established in 1861 as a breakaway from the Wharf Street Baptist Church, the mother church of the colony which was formed in 1855. Some Wharf Street members believed it was a mixed church in regard to its doctrine and practice. In particular, they were concerned that it held 'the doctrine of Universal Redemption, requiring only a natural Faith, and pressing as many as they could to make proselytes, into their communion, in addition to which the utmost laxity of discipline prevailed' (3).

This state of affairs is perhaps understandable because, before Wharf Street had been formed, Baptists worshipped together with Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the United Evangelical Church. This church, occupying a building in William Street, dated from early 1849, when the first of Dr John Dunmore Lang's migrants had arrived in the colony. He had arranged for these 'worthy mechanics and virtuous migrants' of firm Protestant persuasion to come to Brisbane to offset convict and Roman Catholic influences (4). The first pastor of the United Evangelical Church was Rev. Charles Stewart, a Baptist of Birmingham who had arrived with the settlers.

The united effort was not a success. The Presbyterians formed their own church in December 1849. The Congregationalists formed theirs three years after the Baptists who had eventually built on a site in Wharf Street on the northern edge of the town (5).

The Wharf Street church was founded on Calvinistic doctrines,

but two years later references to this were dropped from its constitutional document. Thus some of its members felt entirely justified in forming a new church of Particular Baptist faith in 1861. It soon found a permanent home in the adjacent village of Fortitude Valley (population 1336).

The personality of the second pastor of Wharf Street, Rev. Benjamin Gilmore Wilson, was also an important factor in the formation of Jireh Church (6). Described on his memorial tablet as a 'zealous minister of the gospel', Wilson was born in 1827 in County Tyrone, Ireland, of Quaker and Primitive Methodist parents. He travelled to Australia from Yorkshire where his family had moved while he was still a boy. After coming to a deeply personal faith, he was aware of a call to missionary service and studied homoeopathy and theology to fit himself for a medical missionary post. While serving as a pastor in Barnsley, he responded to a call in the London 'Freeman' for a minister for the Wharf Street church. He left England with his wife and children in May 1858 and arrived in Brisbane on 12th September. He was a man of public affairs, well respected, a warm hearted and devoted pastor and a capable preacher. He died in February 1878, a month after his resignation from the pastorate following a long period of ill health.

While he was quick to respect Christians of other persuasions, he nevertheless found it difficult to tolerate those of narrower views than his own. It was inevitable therefore that tensions should arise between him and any in his church who were not in agreement with him. Consequently several disagreements and breakaways resulted (7). Although Wilson was believed to be greatly distressed over these problems, he seemed unable to help himself or to rectify the situation, even over a lengthy period of time. When invited to the laying of the foundation stone of the Jireh chapel, for example, he responded in the following manner in a letter which was read at the gathering and published in the secular press:

As far as I am personally concerned, I have given you (John Kingsford) sufficient proof of a brotherly feeling in every matter concerning us as bretheren. Further cooperation than this you will not expect from me ... I have never sought to promote dis-union; your well meaning brethren have withdrawn from our fellowship on grounds which, if I acceded to your request, would be equal to blaming myself and the remainder of the Church for not going away with them. (8)

Thereafter, Wilson was conspicuous by his absence from the public meetings at Jireh even though the other city ministers were usually present. It was left to his successor to repair the breach with an official visit as an anniversary preacher in August 1879 soon after taking up the pastorate.

Establishment

Having given up all hope of reforming the Wharf Street church, the founders of Jireh church (9) were pleased when, early in 1861, they heard a recent arrival in the colony preach 'the word with boldness, contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints' (10).

He was John Kingsford, who was soon to be made pastor of the Jireh Church.

John's brother, Richard Ash, was already well known in Brisbane as an enterprising businessman who advertised himself as a 'Draper, Hosier, Haberdasher, Silk Mercer and Clothier'. He worked from a two-storey building in Queen Street in the main business district of North Brisbane. He became mayor of Brisbane in 1876 and was a member of state parliament from 1875 to 1883.

R. A. Kingsford was also a foundation member of Wharf Street church, and had acted as pastor for almost two years before the arrival of Benjamin Wilson. During the early part of 1861, John and Richard Kingsford preached regularly in the Presbyterian Church, Grey Street, South Brisbane, with John being recognized as the interim minister of the church (11). It was the break up of this partnership with the departure of R. A. Kingsford for a visit to England in August 1861 that provided the occasion for serious discussion about the formation of a church where Calvinist doctrine could be maintained consistently within Baptist polity.

Soon a group of about sixteen people was meeting regularly on week nights and on Sunday evenings for worship and fellowship. By December, a 'Declaration of Faith and Practice' had been prepared and adopted. The formation of the church took place on 11th March 1862 in the home of Thomas Sands, where the foundation members

did there in the Name of Jesus give to each other the right hand of Fellowship, promising by the aid of efficacious [sic] grace, to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, to continue steadfast in the doctrines set forth in our Articles.

The first communion service was held on 6th April.

Building a chapel

By mid-year, it was decided to adopt the offer of one of the members, Thomas Price, to purchase land from him at Gipps Street, Fortitude Valley, at two pounds per foot frontage. Although it was only eight hundred metres away from the Wharf Street church, the site of the new chapel was in an area that had only a few years before had been regarded as a 'no man's land'. Access to it from the main town of North Brisbane (population 3469) was indirect. Although the district was to grow during the 1860s, it was not until the 1890s that it became a major commercial centre and established itself as Brisbane's second retail area.

The foundation stone of the chapel was laid on 19th August 1862. The building was designed by the well known local architect, Benjamin Backhouse (1829-1904), in Gothic Revival style. It was built by Thomas Price at a cost of £2000, and opened on 7th December by the Rev. John Bunyan M'Cure of the Particular Baptist Church, Sydney (12). The shingle-roofed brick structure based on a stone foundation was sixty-two feet by thirty feet in size and sat two hundred persons. The interior fittings were of pine, with cedar pews.

This building, which was described as 'a very neat and substantial structure', was the only chapel the church ever used for its permanent home. Some modifications were made to the interior at various times, and a school hall was erected beside it in 1866 (13).

At the time when the church ceased to operate, the chapel was the oldest Baptist church building in the state still in use. It had been listed by the National Trust with a 'B' classification, indicating that its preservation was strongly recommended. In 1980, the building passed out of Baptist hands, but it was still being used for religious purposes (14).

Pastor

The leader of pioneer fellowship, Rev. John Kingsford was born at Canterbury, England, in 1818 (15). He preached his first sermon in that town at the age of twenty one years, having been 'converted from a state of indifferent carelessness on matters of religion' through the efforts of Particular Baptists. Before coming to Brisbane, he had spent twenty four years as a preacher in various Strict Baptist churches in East Kent.

His preaching, based on his belief in the 'sovereign, unmerited... and electing grace of God', was received by his Brisbane congregation with 'increasing profit and delight'. Accordingly, he was soon formally invited to 'take the pastoral care' of the new church, being called to 'warn, admonish, instruct and feed (them) with the good Word of God' (16).

By January 1862 he was exercising a pastoral role, but he was not officially installed until the opening of the chapel in December. He gave his services on an honorary basis until 1871, after which he was a full-time salaried pastor. In 1887 he wanted to resign on account of his age, but the church took no steps to replace him. So he continued in office until 1899 when he was eighty one years of age and the longest serving pastor in Queensland. He died in 1905.

Although Kingsford enjoyed popularity throughout most of his long and fruitful ministry, he was not always satisfied with the church's spiritual state. For example, as early as March 1865 doubts about his success and the failure of the church to clear the building debt caused him to foreshadow his resignation. There were also various occasions in later years when financial support for him was irregular and uncertain. Then again in February 1886, he drew attention to a 'growing coldness towards him', and an indifference towards the church and its spiritual life by the members.

As the first pastor of the church, Kingsford was not the sole force behind it, even though his remarkable ministry was a key factor in its growth. He was one of a group of men and women whose firm commitment to Calvinistic principles of churchmanship obliged them to initiate and sustain the new work. But the impetus of the original commitment faltered a little with time, and Kingsford found himself somewhat alone among men of lesser ability and vision. In 1871, for example, Thomas Price, the builder of the chapel, died, being

honoured with a warm tribute recorded in the Church Book. Six years later, Kingsford (who had charge of the Book by then) added these telling words to the foot of the page where the tribute was recorded:

Dear Brother Price how has the writer missed you, no friend like you has yet appeared to do as you did. We struggled together for Jireh but thus far helpers have been wanting - while hinderers have abounded. (17)

Doctrinal Principles

There are some scattered but valuable references in the church records to the factors controlling its early life. The most important of these is a rather detailed account of the formation of the church and lengthy doctrinal statement adopted at its establishment. Taken together with other statements and casual references, these materials provide enough data to reconstruct with some assurance the church's ethos and doctrinal principles (18).

The basic document, 'The Articles of Faith and Rules of Practice', was drawn up by the founders themselves and covers thirteen pages of manuscript in the Church Book. It consists of a preamble setting out the nature of a gospel church, a five point covenant for church members, fourteen articles of faith, and twenty nine rules for the conduct of the church and its business.

The preamble defines the church as a voluntary association of Christians who meet 'together in any place for hearing the Word of God, and the administration of his Ordinances'. This typical Baptist statement continues by declaring that membership involves active participation in the 'concerns' of the church, and 'subjection' to its laws which were created for the 'preservation of unity, and the maintenance of good order that ought ever to prevail in Christian assemblies'.

The Covenant also stressed the 'holy union and fellowship' and urged submission to the 'discipline of the gospel, and all holy duties required of us in the Scripture' in an attitude of humility and dependence upon 'the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit'. These duties were specified in detail, including a godly life; prayer for each other and for the church, its pastor and officers; mutual loving concern among members; unity; attendance at meetings for worship and prayer; loyal support of the pastor's ministry; and financial support of the church. Hearty affirmation of the spirit of the Covenant and conscientious subjection to its detailed provisions on the part of the member were conditions which created a tightly knit, clearly identifiable fellowship contrasting strongly with the less rigorous spirit prevailing in the mother church.

The Articles of Faith are introduced by the statement that it was a 'privilege and duty' for those who had given themselves 'to the Lord, and to one another by the will of God' to declare their faith 'to the honour of Christ, and to the glory of his name'. Romans chapter 10 verse 10 is quoted in full in the text of the document at this point indicating the importance placed upon the Articles. They are clearly

regarded as a confession of faith and as a doxology (19).

For the most part, the fourteen articles cover evangelical doctrine in an orthodox fashion, including Scripture (*1), the Trinity (*2), the salvation of man (*4) through Christ's atoning death (*5), the resurrection to judgement and the second coming (*13).

As may be anticipated, the articles uphold the doctrine of election and 'special and particular redemption and the perseverance of the saints' (*3, *6). A position similar to that of other major Reformed confessions is adopted in the statement that 'before the world began, God did elect a certain number of persons unto everlasting salvation... of his own free grace, and according to the good pleasure of his will; ... and that in pursuance of his gracious design, he made a covenant of grace and peace with his Son Jesus Christ, on the behalf of these persons' (*3).

Other articles continue to give a Baptist interpretation of the Calvinist position. Thus, Baptism is by immersion and follows clear teaching on, and evidence of, divine grace in the person's life. It is followed by church membership and partaking of communion (*11). It is also affirmed that 'holiness of heart and life' is produced by the grace of the gospel, i.e. by the Holy Spirit, and that it is necessary to 'press after a heavenly and evangelical obedience to all the commands' of Christ. For this purpose, there is 'the certainty of divine assistance to perseverance from manifested grace to the enjoyment of eternal glory' (*8).

The evangelistic work, upon which the church placed great emphasis, was based on the principle that the gospel is 'applied by God the Holy Spirit' so that the elect come to receive faith as the gift of God. Or, to put it in other words, faith 'is not the duty of man in an unregenerate state... but of the mighty, efficacious grace of God the Holy Ghost' (*9).

The Articles affirm that 'it is the will of God that his called people should be congregated together for the purpose of open and public worship (20) and for mutual help' (*10). Communion is not to be observed in private, but within the context of the Sunday meeting and among the baptised only (*12)(21).

It is unusual, however, to find the explicit statement that there are three ordinances or dominical precepts (*10). Baptism and communion are preceded in the document by reference to the 'preaching of the gospel' as a 'standing' ordinance on the same basis as the other two. Although at first such a concept may seem irregular, it is seen upon reflection that this statement is in accordance with the church's beliefs, since it held that preaching is the means by which saving grace is made efficacious. Such a view in broad, non-Calvinist, terms appears to be held also by many other evangelicals (at least implicitly), to judge by the role given to the preaching of the Word in worship, evangelism and nurture.

It is because preaching was considered an ordinance that the Covenant expected members to place great importance upon the

pastor's role. It stated they were to 'constantly attend upon his ministry', and to 'strengthen his hands and not desert him in his ministrations so long as he shall take the gospel for his guide, publish the doctrines of free grace as contained in our articles of faith, and his walk and conversation be according to godliness' (Covenant para.5). The church was therefore able to consider the pastor's ministry as (one of) the chief means by which the gospel message was 'applied by God the Holy Spirit', and by which the gift of saving faith was bestowed.

This reference to preaching indicates how much bearing the church's doctrinal principles had upon its practice. Further consideration of some important matters will help to illustrate this point, and so clarify the doctrinal beliefs of the church.

Practice: Preachers

A clear case is the church's approach to the commissioning or ordination of preachers. The Baptist Association (later, Baptist Union) was not, of course, in existence when the Jireh Church was first established (22). This permitted the church to express itself in its own way without bureaucratic inhibition from that quarter at least. However, after the formation of the Association, the church still operated in accordance with the principle that it was 'the will of the Great Head of the Church to qualify and send forth men to preach the everlasting gospel of Christ' (*9).

The usual practice was that when one of the (male) members of the church appeared to be 'qualified' by possession of a gift for preaching, he was invited to deliver a series of sermons before the members with a view to accreditation by the church. Upon successful completion of this task, he was set apart with words which acknowledged his divine calling and gifts and encouraged him in the use and improvement of the gift. The church also assured him that it pledged 'itself to sustain him by the earnest prayers and most affectionate sympathies of the brethren' (23).

Despite the deep doctrinal convictions lying behind this process, it was not always the case that the candidates were given full or unconditional accreditation automatically. It was not unusual for preachers to be 'advised not to preach on doctrinal or controversial questions', or to improve their theology or their command of English so that they might be 'as efficient as possible for the great and important work in which [they] desired to engage'. One preacher was withdrawn from for failure to accept discipline (24).

Practice: Membership

The doctrinal principles contained in the Articles also governed the attitudes and procedures employed in the reception of members. It was written into the rules of the church that candidates were to be carefully examined 'respecting their life, conversation, and religious experience by messengers duly appointed by the church' (*19) before being accepted. They were also required to 'appear before the church for the purpose of relating their experience of the Lord's dealings

towards them and also for making a declaration of their repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ' (20). Finally, candidates were to be 'acquainted with the Articles of Faith, and the order of the church, to which they shall be required to submit on joining the church' (21).

This practice was usually followed rigorously for the first three decades or so of the life of the church (25). The visitation of the candidates by church members and their testimonies before the church placed considerable emphasis upon the immediate consciousness of divine grace and its manifestation in their daily life. The Church Book often records such an occasion with expressions of thankfulness and joy, noting that as a candidate 'related his experience of the Lord's dealings ... he gave a most interesting and satisfactory statement, shewing the greatness and mercy of God in His convicting and sanctifying grace' (26). Descriptions like this, which clearly reflect the church's doctrinal beliefs, indicate how important these events were for the church, providing it with some of its most memorable occasions of inspiration and fellowship.

The priority given to handling of membership applications in the affairs of the church also reflected the same scale of values. Many a meeting was given over almost entirely to this process and to the hearing of testimonies. There was also a flow-on from these meetings to the occasions when the new converts were baptised. These were also often remembered as times of great inspiration and joy for the church (27).

Care to see that only those with a genuine experience of grace were received into membership also extended to transfers from other churches 'of the same faith and order'. People in this category seeking membership needed a letter of dismissal from their home church, but they were also required to 'appear before the church for the purpose of relating their experience' (*22). Exceptions to this practice seem to have applied mostly to transfers from other Particular Baptist Churches, either in New South Wales or in Britain (28).

Therefore it appears that Jireh church was prepared to recognize as churches in close fellowship only those that it believed were virtually identical to it in doctrine and associated practice. This highly restrictive policy was feasible while the church was not obliged to maintain close relationships with other nearby churches which were generally not of Particular Baptist persuasion. However, it inevitably suffered when contact between these churches became more common, particularly after the formation of the Baptist Association in 1877, in which Jireh played a full part. It is in these circumstances that the strict principles of the Jireh church began to come under some pressure. This matter will be taken up again later.

Practice: Discipline

The distinctive beliefs of the church may also be seen in its attitude towards discipline. According to the rules, members not attending services of communion for two consecutive months were to be visited, a practice which was carried out with some degree of consistency.

However, it is the objective of the visitation that is to be observed. The rules stated that defaulting members were to be 'exhorted ... to return to their privileges and duty' (*25). This indeed was the emphasis that appears in most of the several examples of discipline recorded in the Church Book. For example, in 1867, the church had cause to express its 'sorrow' when one of its members was reported in the daily press as having seriously assaulted another man. The church was, however, emphatic in 'assuring him of their confidence in, and affection for him' (29). In other cases, it was clearly stated that the visitation was 'for the purpose of reminding [the member] of [his] duties to the Church and of the importance of availing [himself] of the privileges in connection with the Church of God' (30). As with initial membership procedure, church discipline reflected a clearly defined understanding of the basis of membership and a sense of the church's inner dynamic (31). Both of these characteristics were integrated with the church's doctrinal basis.

The church was composed of those who could testify to a real and personal knowledge of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, made known through the gospel as preached from Scripture. The members recognized and willingly affirmed that the church existed to worship God, to witness to the faith and to nourish Christians. Being accepted as a member involved the 'privilege' of sharing and drawing upon this grace, and the 'duty' of supporting the ministry of fellow-members, the pastor and deacons in particular and the church as a body.

With a voluntary commitment of this kind so clearly in view at the outset, it was usually a straight-forward matter to exercise discipline in regard to offences such as sustained absence from worship, irregularity of conduct, moral lapses, refusal to submit to the church's authority, and apathy in regard to spiritual privileges afforded by membership in the church. Even when it came to withdrawing from members who showed no signs of positive response to visitation, there were no serious problems. It was not unknown for members to anticipate discipline and to accept it without resentment (32). Thus the intended beneficial results mostly seemed to flow from the practice.

The same respect for the evident working of divine grace may be seen in the church's approach to the ordination of preachers, mentioned earlier.

Practice: evangelism

It was also clear in the church's evangelistic work. The frequent meetings devoted to membership applications were related, to some extent at least, to the large-scale migration of people into the colony that was taking place at the time, especially during the 1860s (33). But the number of baptisms which are recorded in the Church Book is also an indication of the extent of the church's evangelistic ministry, and of the fulfilment of the church's prayer that the pastor would have 'many souls for [his] hire' (34).

Although there is little explicit reference in the records to the church's theology of evangelism (apart from the Articles of Faith), it was fully committed to proclaiming the gospel to as many people as

possible in the confidence that God would use the preaching of the cross to call people to himself. Its objection to the evangelistic methods of Wharf Street and other similar churches was that they were 'pressing for decisions' as if conversion was purely a human affair, and not a gift of divine grace. Jireh's Calvinistic beliefs did not inhibit evangelism, but rather determined its approach to the preaching of the gospel (35). In actual practice, its evangelistic ministry was quite extensive and diverse (36).

First of all, it expected that the pastor's regular ministry, focused in his preaching, would be fruitful in producing conversions. He was, in fact, known as a strong advocate of evangelism and devoted his address as president of Baptist Association (1880) to 'The Furtherance of the Gospel'.

In addition to this pastoral evangelism, the church engaged in special evangelistic missions, using either local or visiting preachers; it worked in co-operation with other groups or by itself as circumstances required (37). For example, in August-September 1881, it participated in the Baptist Association sponsored visit of two evangelists from Spurgeon's College, London, Messrs. Harrison and Isaacs (38). In November 1885, it co-operated with other churches in Fortitude Valley for a ten-day mission with a visiting preacher. Yet in August 1883, local preachers were featured in another series of evangelistic meetings. At a much later time, 1912, it endorsed heartily the visit to Brisbane of the Chapman-Alexander team, as it had the unsuccessful invitation to Moody and Sankey which had been organised by the Y.M.C.A. twenty years earlier (39).

The results of these missions varied, but there is enough evidence to suggest that, overall, the effort and the policies in their favour were entirely justified. In the Harrison-Isaacs mission, there had been two to three hundred responses, 'many of whom were led by Divine Grace to trust in the finished work of our Lord and Saviour' (40). More than forty became church members, and the monthly church meeting was revived after having lapsed some time earlier due to lack of interest.

The church also saw its Sunday School (and other activities and facilities) as evangelistically motivated. The underlying attitude was revealed when the Sunday School hall was opened in December 1866. The note in the Church Book recording the event expressed the desire that 'in it may many souls be born again'. It appeared that this prayer was indeed answered, because within five years, several of the candidates for baptism were referred to as 'young friends', being young people whose parents were already church members.

The church was also evangelistically active on a broader front in at least two ways. In the first place, its concern for outreach resulted in the formation of several churches in outlying suburban areas. These were commenced in a variety of circumstances, but Jireh church was always prepared to back the new works fully and enthusiastically. These churches became stable, often flourishing, independent bodies in fellowship with Jireh and the Baptist Association, although it does not appear that any of them were prominent as Calvinistic churches (41).

Several of them in turn sponsored new works.

Jireh church also helped more distant churches by supplying pastors for the provincial centres of Ipswich, Townsville and Freestone (42). The links with Freestone, about 115 kilometres south-west of Brisbane on the edge of the Darling Downs, one of the earliest of Queensland's farming communities, are important in regard to the second type of broader evangelistic activity. Jireh fostered a ministry in the Danish language which took place initially at the chapel itself. It was led by a recent arrival, Andreas Kristian Jensen, who was accepted as a member on 29th May 1883, upon receipt of letters of dismissal from a church in his homeland where he had carried out an active lay ministry. He was accredited as a preacher in March 1884 upon the initiative of a group of Danish Baptists from Freestone. In October 1886, after the formation of a church in that locality, he was commissioned by Jireh to take up the pastorate.

A second example of ethnic work is reflected in the baptism and membership of some Polynesians. Three only are mentioned by name (Jack, Samuel and David), although reference is made in the records to a group of unspecified size worshipping at the church (43). They were, no doubt, among the indentured Polynesian labourers brought to Queensland to work on the sugar plantations in the tropical north from 1863 until the end of the century (44). Ten years before Florence Young had begun her well known work amongst this group of people (45), Jireh was taking its ministry to them seriously, making special arrangements for those who were in its congregation (46).

In review, it is evident that even though the Calvinistic principles of the church were not paraded prominently at all times, they determined its character in many important areas of its life. Detailed studies of other churches flourishing during this period would be useful in assessing the comparative importance of the impact of Calvinistic principles at Jireh. But it is noticeable that certain changes in the church's practice and policies took place at the same time as changes in its attitude towards Calvinism also became apparent.

Decay of Calvinism?

In the official history of the Baptist Union of Queensland, John E. White concludes that Jireh church had lost its specific Calvinistic character by 1905 at the time when Rev. J. E. Walton took up the pastorate, forty four years after the church had been formed (47). White also refers to an abortive attempt to reintroduce adherence to those principles in 1911. However, the evidence relating to these claims needs closer examination.

In 1871 there was an attempt to open up communion to members of other Baptist churches. Discussion on this matter was deferred and apparently not taken up again, but two years later, tokens were in use to maintain the purity of the table in the face of a considerable increase in membership (48). Thus it appears that at this time there was no decline in a strict approach to Calvinism or close communion.

A year later, in 1874, the original locally written Articles of Faith

were replaced by the 1689 London Confession. There is little data to indicate the reasons for this change or the significance the church saw in this particular confession. It was, however, recorded that the church saw the confession generally not as an 'authoritative rule wherewith to fetter the conscience and judgement, but as an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness' (49).

But the same year, the church diverged from this Confession by making an alteration to its administrative structure. It appointed lay elders who were given the task of administering discipline, caring for the spiritual welfare of the church and those secular activities which did not already devolve upon the deacons. The Confession itself gave the first two of these functions to full-time bishops or pastors, who were also known as elders. In Jireh's case, the pastor alone filled this role (50).

There were no clear principles guiding the church's structures, except the flexibility dictated by local needs, especially those relating to financial affairs. However, Kingsford as pastor had a firm hold on the church's life (51), especially as the founders died or for other reasons no longer exerted their accustomed influence.

In 1879, an opportunity for considering the church's doctrinal basis once again arose with the proposal to erect a new chapel on a nearby site. There was still no sign of decline in commitment to Calvinism for it was decided quite strongly to retain the original doctrinal formulation for the proposed new trust deed and to maintain strict controls on communion (52). Three years later the church protested successfully at the conduct of an open communion at a Baptist Association meeting (53).

It is possible that during the mid-1880s zeal for Calvinistic principles may have declined. In February 1886, Kingsford expressed concern about 'the paucity of attendance at the Sabbath services' because he believed that this indicated 'a growing coldness towards him and indifference with regards to the means of grace'. By July of that year there was also serious concern about a drop in financial support. As a result of these developments Kingsford asked to be relieved of the pastorate from August 1887. The crisis was apparently over by the end of the year as there were celebrations of thanksgiving for Kingsford's continuing ministry.

By 1891, however, it is evident that a distinct change was taking place. In May it was decided that candidates for membership were no longer required to give their testimony before the church, thus bringing to an end one of the most characteristic features of the church's life. It was no coincidence that discipline became a matter for the church officers alone (54).

Apparently this trend away from the explicit emphasis upon Calvinistic principles did not go unchallenged. In June 1896, it was stipulated that a certain candidate for accreditation as a preacher should be examined upon Calvinistic doctrines in particular. He refused to comply with this direction and lost his provisional

accreditation which had been granted by virtue of his considerable preaching ability. Then again, in March 1898, it was carefully pointed out in an obituary for Isaac James Bickmore that he 'loved the doctrines of God's grace commonly called Calvinism'.

Kingsford resigned in July 1899, but there is no indication that his successor, Rev. E. A. Kirwood of Maldon, Victoria, was examined for his conformity to Particular Baptist beliefs. However, this might mean that there was no need to question his beliefs on the grounds that they were known to be compatible with the church's long established basis. His ministry was brief and uneventful, being cut short in 1904 by illness in the family.

As a possible successor, Rev. J. E. Walton of Latrobe, Tasmania, was invited to conduct an interim ministry. White notes correctly the fact that the wording of the record of his call places no emphasis upon Calvinistic doctrines (55). He concludes that by this time the church had lost its distinctive character. But the record indicates that Walton wished to be known as 'an evangelical pastor' and accordingly confessed his belief in the 'great principles' of Protestantism (56). Remarks he made at his welcome throw some further light upon the situation, for they indicate that he deplored a 'parochial spirit' (57). Therefore, keeping in mind the state of the Protestant churches at this time, Walton was, as he made clear, simply affirming his commonly held evangelical beliefs over against 'sacerdotalism' and 'rationalism', rather than offering any comment upon his attitude to Calvinism (58). After all, there had been no change in the church's official, legal basis, and it is not reasonable to suppose that a pastor would be called or would accept a call if he were in fundamental disagreement with the church's well known stance, especially in view of the stern wording of the church's rules on this point (59).

This conclusion is also confirmed by events in 1912-13 to which White also refers. It was emphatically stressed in the Church Book that the rejection of the move to reintroduce closed communion in October 1912 did not imply a move towards open membership. It appears that this discussion was associated with the discovery of an anomaly in the church's legal basis, which required a series of meetings in 1913 to rectify. A new constitution was prepared to deal with the situation, in which the name 'Jireh Particular Baptist Church' was specifically included. Thus, the Calvinistic basis of the church was deliberately retained. In general agreement with this decision, the former rule that baptised members of other churches be invited to commune was carefully changed to read, 'We do not restrict from communion at the Lord's Table those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity'. Similarly, it was agreed that the announcement of the communion celebration would be made in the following familiar words, 'At the close of the present service the ordinance of the Lord's Supper will be observed' (60).

So as the Jireh church began its second half-century, it is clear that the Calvinistic principles which had brought it into existence at first had not been suspended, even if they were held as something of a formality, rather than as a living force. This was perhaps a natural process with the passing of the highly motivated founding generation.

There was little evidence to suggest that any concerted effort had been made through the years to teach these principles to the younger generation. There was little likelihood that these trends would be reversed by outside influence. The Baptist theological colleges which had been commenced in Queensland and elsewhere by this time were not marked by any commitment to Calvinism. Indeed, even within Presbyterianism, the rigours of traditional Calvinism had been set on one side with the adoption of a Declaratory statement setting out the way in which the Westminster Confession was to be interpreted (61). There was little readily available literature which made out a convincing case for Calvinism.

Thus it was difficult for a church like Jireh to sustain its former level of Calvinist belief and piety. No other church in Queensland was able to stand beside it, and so the Calvinist witness withered. A few churches in New South Wales continued to maintain Calvinist principles, but they were small and not in fellowship with the Union (62). It was not until the period after World War II that there was any revival of interest in Calvinism amongst Baptists in Australia, and even then it was not without considerable controversy (63). By the late 1970s, a number of Reformed Baptist churches were beginning to appear, and the 1689 Confession was beginning to gain acceptance again. But by then Reformed theology was much more widely understood and accepted in the evangelical community as a whole (64). However, Jireh church was unable to benefit from these developments. It had long since lost even its residual commitment to Calvinism and any hope of the revival of the church as a strong centre of evangelism had been choked by the vast changes in the city that had grown around it.

NOTES

- 1 Growth was indicated by pastoral expansion, establishment of public transport (coach and railway), gas lighting, gold discoveries, establishment of free education, important Land Acts passed. There were also major fires in Brisbane and a severe financial crisis. In the 1868 Census, the first in which Baptists were listed separately, there were 2088 Baptists in Queensland and 1237 in Brisbane.
- 2 The minutes and other notes from the establishment of the church onwards are recorded in a series of volumes known as the *Church Book*, which are housed in the Baptist Union of Queensland Archives, Brisbane. Otherwise undocumented references in this paper are to the relevant Church Book entries.
- 3 Church Book, 'A Brief outline of the origen [sic]...' Wharf St church seemed to be passing through a period of low quality life in the early 1860s with problems of discipline, finance, personality and administration.
- 4 'The History of the Valley', (mimeographed) by the Fortitude Valley Field Study Centre (Oxley Library, Brisbane OM 994.31 FOR,

Vert. File). Brisbane began as a penal colony in 1824 (for serious offenders) and was only opened to free settlers in 1842.

- 5 In 1891 the church moved to its present imposing building in Wickham Terrace and adopted the name, City Tabernacle Baptist Church.
- 6 For biographical information, see *A Zealous Minister of the Gospel* (a family memoir, Brisbane, 1940), and H. Stuart Patterson, 'Diary of a Medical Parson', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 24th Nov. 1951, pp.697-701. Thanks are expressed to the City Tabernacle for access to its records.
- 7 J. E. White, *A Fellowship of Service* (Brisbane, Baptist Union of Queensland, 1977), pp.40-45.
- 8 The [Brisbane] *Courier*, 21.8.1862, p.2 col.6.
- 9 They were James and Helen (or Ellen) Birt, John and Hannah Bale (a bricklayer from Norfolk, residing at Wickham St), Thomas and Mary Childs (a farmer who arrived with 7 children on the *Maria Gomez* in July 1852, residing at German Station [Nundah], Thomas George Watson, Walter Cook [in whose home the first meeting was held; he disagreed with some of the Articles of Faith and played little further part], Thomas Sands and wife, Thomas Price (a fruiterer of Leichhardt St), Thomas Boniface and John Kingsford. (The information in parentheses is drawn from later Post Office Directories, and from ships' lists, and is provisional). Birt, Bale and Sands arrived on the *Chaseley*, one of Lang's ships; all came from London, the West Country or the Midlands. (*Church Book*, 'Brief outline').
- 10 *Church Book*, 'Brief outline'.
- 11 *Courier*, 21,2,61. R. Bardon, *The Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland* (Brisbane, Presbyterian Church, 1949), pp.20-22; A. Hay, *Jubilee Memorial of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland* (Brisbane, Alex Muir, 1900), pp.3,4,12,13. Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, the celebrated Australian airman, was a nephew.
- 12 *Courier*, 8.12.82, p.2. There were several subsequent contacts between Jireh and M'Cure, including a visit by him in 1865. On the Strict and Particular Baptists in New South Wales, see A. C. Prior, *Some Fell on Good Ground* (Sydney, Baptist Union of NSW, 1966), chap.7.
- 13 See *The Courier*, 8.12.82, 12.12.82. The school room measured 47 feet by 16 feet 6 inches. The property was held under trustees until difficulties developed; incorporation followed with Letters Patent dated 22.9.76. The church employed many financial arrangements, including pew rents.
- 14 *Queensland Baptist*, Oct.1870, p.2. *Australian Baptist*, 9th June 1982. The final service was held on Sunday, 17th Dec. 1978 (*Australian Baptist*, 13th Dec. 1978).

- 15 There is little information available about Kingsford, apart from a newspaper cutting (possibly *Old Baptist*) in the *Church Book* at 23rd Aug. 1899; *Courier*, 12.12.1862 and *Church Book*, passim.
- 16 *Church Book*, letter of call to J. Kingsford, p.4.
- 17 *Church Book*, 9.3.71.
- 18 The last page is water damaged. In February 1864, it was decided that the Articles of Faith and Rules of the Church should be read at church meetings quarterly. (The numbers in the text refer to paragraphs in the Articles and Rules).
- 19 On this point, see W. M. S. West, 'Baptists and Statements of Faith', *Expository Times*, vol.91 (1979-80), pp. 228-233. There is no document in W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia, Judson, 1959) like the Jireh Articles, and there is no indication in the *Church Book* as to who drew up the document or what sources may have been used.
- 20 Worship was held twice on the 'Sabbath' with a midweek meeting for prayer; there were occasional Tea Meetings (Tuesday evenings, usually) and other social gatherings. The following order was adopted in February 1867 in an effort to 'improve' the worship: prayer, singing, reading the Scripture with exposition, singing, prayer, singing, sermon, singing, benediction. A responsive Scripture reading introduced in February 1890 was dropped only two months later because, as an 'innovation', it was causing too much disturbance. It was the practice to have the hymns read out (7.4.68) with different hymn books being used over a period of time, including Denhams, Dr Watts' *Psalms and Hymns*, Spurgeon's *Our Own Hymns*, and Sankeys. There were occasional notes expressing concern with the quality of singing. A musical instrument (organ) was in use at the latest by 1872.
- 21 At the commencement of the church, communion was held monthly. A quarterly evening communion was introduced in 1871 and in 1873 there was a move to conduct communion more frequently. Wine was used as the element.
- 22 The Association was formed in 1877. There is no indication in the published record of the Baptist Union as to when the first ordination under its auspices was conducted.
- 23 *Church Book*, 10.7.73, 27.2.82. Certificate of recognition as a preacher, A. C. Jensen 1884 (Baptist Archives). Wharf St church followed a similar practice, but evidently with less rigour; its main motivation was the need to service its own several outstations.
- 24 *Church Book*, 23.11.74, 31.8.75, 24.3.85, 17.5.96.
- 25 *Church Book* 28.5.91. The 'usual' questions put to a candidate concerned willingness to support the church by finance, prayer, attendance on the means of grace (Sunday services, prayer meetings), the business meetings and other meetings as far as practicable.

- 26 *Church Book*, 18.1.70, 13.9.64.
- 27 *Church Book*, 13.10.67. From 1861-1872 (incl.) 189 people were received as members, 79 of whom were baptised (*Church Book* entries). In 1885, official church membership was 153, 151 Sunday School scholars, 16 teachers. The only exceptions to the regular procedure were when the candidates were considered to be cases of 'extreme diffidence'; then the meeting itself was permitted to assess the application on its merits.
- 28 Virtually no details of the British churches are given in the records. Contrast, K. R. Manley and M. Petras, *The First Australian Baptists* (Sydney, Baptist Historical Soc. of N.S.W., 1981).
- 29 *Church Book*, 16.3.67 fol. *Courier*, 15.7.67, p.2, col.4.
- 30 *Church Book*, 16.7.67, 27.2.71. 18.1.70. The Rules required a member who was moving out of the district to join another church of the same faith and order (23) or to keep in contact with the Jireh Church, stating whose ministry the member was receiving (*24).
- 31 The mid-week Tea Meeting, usually held quarterly, reflected and enhanced the spirit of the church. They were also typically referred to as 'interesting and happy occasions' (25.7.66).
- 32 *Church Book*, 23.11.74, 21.12.74, 27.6.65. Wharf St church also handled many cases of discipline during this period, some of them serious.
- 33 The population of Queensland rose from 25,320 in 1859 to 115,272 in 1870, while that of Brisbane rose from 5,000 in 1859 to 25,915 in 1871. In the 6 years from 1859, 5000 migrants arrived in Brisbane.
- 34 *Church Book*, call letter. J. Edwin Orr argues strongly that Australia was at this time seeing the impact of the 1859 awakening (*Evangelical Awakenings in the South Seas*, Minneapolis, Bethany, 1976, chap.8); the figures and other data on which this view is based have been disputed (*New Life* 22.9.77); also there is no suggestion in the records of Jireh Church that it was aware of participating in a wider movement.
- 35 On this point, see J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (London, I.V.F., 1961), pp.106ff.
- 36 This emphasis did not preclude altogether attention being paid to matters of social concern and public affairs, even if its efforts in this direction were low key.
- 37 The first revivalist to work in Australia may have been W. 'California' Taylor (Orr, op.cit. p.57), but another interpretation suggests the first was Dr Sommerville of Scotland in 1877. (W. W. Phillips, *Defending a 'Christian Country'*, St.

- Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1981, p.59f). See also, W. G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, (New York, Ronald Press, 1959). Taylor began preaching in Melbourne in 1863.
- 38 Jireh church did not appear to show any greater interest in Spurgeon than other Baptist churches in Australia, despite its Calvinism. It was Spurgeon's evangelistic leadership which affected Australian Baptists most, especially through the large number of graduates of his college who served in Australian churches. For further discussion, see David Parker, *Fundamentalism and Conservative Protestantism in Australia, 1920-1980* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Qld., 1982), p.133 (University Microfilms Int. publication number 83-04,170).
- 39 Initially the church feared that Chapman and Alexander were motivated by commercialism, an opinion shared by others as well (*Church Book*, 10.3.92, 15.9.1912. D. Parker, op.cit. p.409).
- 40 *Church Book*, 4.10.81, 22.1.82. See also *Church Book*, 24.7.90, 24.4.92.
- 41 There is a 9 page gap in the record in the *Church Book* covering the period June 1868 to January 1870 (the minutes were written up after confirmation). The church at Paddington, known as Windsor Road church (est.1874) was a Particular Baptist Church by constitution, but its doctrinal basis was brief and made reference to the 1689 London Confession (*Minutes*, 5.6.1877). When a dispute over land arose in 1886, the church referred to its Particular Baptist constitution as a basic point in its argument, thus indicating that it had not departed from those principles *de jure* even if *de facto* they were not emphasised. The situation at Albion (est.1883) is unknown because that church has not granted access to its records.
- 42 *Church Book*, 7.4.73, 27.7.75.
- 43 *Church Book*, 3.11.70, 18.19.71, 25.9.71, 7.10.72, 25.2.78.
- 44 About 2,000 of these Polynesians (or 'Kanakas') were brought in during the period 1863-68, amounting to a virtual slave trade. They were poorly treated and often regarded as racially inferior. Some of the worst aspects of their treatment were controlled by legislation in 1868; more than 50,000 were imported by 1890. The practice was finally prohibited by government action around the turn of the century and most were repatriated to their homeland.
- 45 F. S. H. Young, *Pearls from the Pacific* (London, Marshall Bros., 1926); Alison Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands* (Wheaton, Harold Shaw, 1977); D. Hilliard, 'The South Sea Evangelical Mission in the Solomon Islands', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 4 (1969), pp.41-64.
- 46 The arrangements included seating (the church normally allocated pews) and modification of the normal rules for processing of membership applications. By 1901, 279 of the 9327 Polynesians in

the state were classed as Baptist for the purposes of the census.

- 47 White, op.cit., p.39.
- 48 *Church Book*, 14.8.73.
- 49 *Church Book*, 22.6.74. Windsor Road church also used the same wording.
- 50 *Church Book* 19.10.74. Windsor Road church appointed elders at first.
- 51 This was clearly illustrated in March 1872 when the church was 'fearfully disturbed' by the sudden resignation of its officers. Kingsford took 'absolute' control personally, suspending business meetings. The crisis was resolved in a 'brotherly' spirit and with 'prolonged' prayer and a thorough review of the administration. In December 1874, Kingsford again took a strong lead, gaining the support of the church but causing some members to secede and form another fellowship.
- 52 *Church Book*, 11.8.79.
- 53 *Church Book*, 27.11.82. The Association agreed in future to offer communion to Baptist church members only, but a further protest was required in September 1905.
- 54 *Church Book*, 27.3.1912.
- 55 White, op.cit., p.39.
- 56 *Courier*, 6.3.1905 (report of induction).
- 57 *Telegraph*, 15.3.1905 (report of public welcome).
- 58 See, for example, Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1980s* (St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1973), pp.260-264. W. W. Phillips, op.cit., ch.5, *Courier*, 6.3.1905.
- 59 Rule 17 stated 'that should the Pastors' [sic] conduct be inconsistent with his profession and office, or should he preach doctrines contrary to the fundamental truths of the Gospel as set forth in our Articles of Faith, he shall be admonished by the Deacons in behalf of the church...'. Failure to respond would lead to dismissal with 3 weeks' notice. This rule may have been a dead letter by this time, however.
- 60 *Church Book*, 11.6.1913.
- 61 A. MacDonald, *One Hundred Years of Presbyterianism in Victoria* (Melbourne, Robertson and Mullens, 1937), chaps. XIII, XIV, esp. p.130.
- 62 A. C. Prior, op.cit., p.98. Attitudes to Calvinism amongst some Australian Baptists a little later may be seen in I. H. Murray,

The Life of Arthur W. Pink (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1981), ch.3.

63 For a discussion, see D. Parker, *op.cit.*, pp.573, 581f.

64 A. Barkley, 'Calvinism in Australia', *Vox Reformata*, No.33 (1979), pp.4-11.

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